

Booklist Reader

Booklist

Leading book discovery

February 2025

Book and audiobook recommendations for all ages

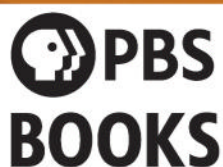
Read-alikes:
They Call It Puppy
(and Kitty) Love

Voice of Choice:
André Santana

Family Reads:
Old Favorites and
New Views on
Black History

Book Map:
The Global Reach
of Rick Riordan

Cover design and illustration by Monique Aimee,
from *Pardon My Frenchie*, by Farrah Rochon





Follow Us on Social Media



Connect and follow us for author interviews, book recommendations, exclusive publisher content, and more!



@ALA-Booklist



@ALA.Booklist



@ALA_Booklist



@BooklistOnline



www.booklistonline.com

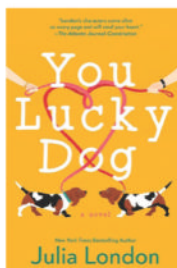
Booklist Reader

February 2025
Volume 4, Issue 6

Spotlight on Romance & Middle-Grade Fiction

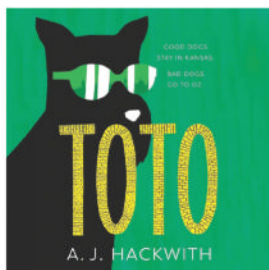
Adult Books

- 3 Kindness Prevails
by Terry Hong
- 4 Top 10
Romances
- 5 Top 10
Debut Romances
- 6 You Are My Sunshine
by John Charles
- 8 Read-alikes
They Call It Puppy (and Kitty) Love
by John Charles
- 10 10 Questions
Katy James
by John Charles
- 12 Recent Business Books
by Donna Seaman
- 14 LibraryReads
February Picks
- 16 Reserve These Reads
Adult



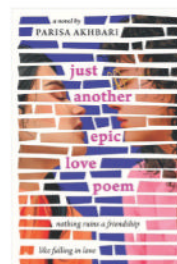
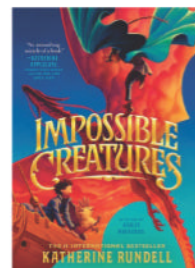
Audiobooks & Video

- 17 Top 10
Romances on Audio
- 18 Voice of Choice
André Santana
by Heather Booth
- 20 PBS Books
Black History Month



Books for Youth

- 22 Top 10
Romances for Youth
- 23 Manga Essentials
Boys Love and Girls Love
for High-Schoolers
by Sara Smith
- 24 Reserve These Reads
Children & Teens
- 26 Family Reads
Old Favorites and New Views on Black History
by Heather Booth and Sarah Hunter
- 28 Book Map
The Global Reach of Rick Riordan
by Sarah Hunter
- 30 Top 10
Novels for Tweens
- 31 Top 10
Middle-Grade Graphic Novels
- 32 Top 10
Fantastical Middle-Grade Novels



On the Cover

From *Pardon My Frenchie*, by Farrah Rochon, which appears in *They Call It Puppy (and Kitty) Love* (p.8). Cover design and illustration by Monique Aimee. Used with permission of Forever (Part of Grand Central Publishing).



From the Publisher

I am ever-grateful for the education, entertainment, and experiences my local library has provided to me and my family. It is also an honor to work for the American Library Association (ALA), an organization that serves libraries and library workers. ALA is a non-profit organization, comprised of approximately 50,000 members, some of whom most likely work in your library. A portion of the revenues for ALA publications, posters, and other products help support continuing education, advocacy initiatives, and so much more in the library ecosystem. It's wonderful when we have the chance to give back to library workers and to ALA members. With that in mind I'm thrilled to announce that ALA members will now receive the digital version of *Booklist Reader* as part of their membership. We know that library workers are exceptionally avid and dedicated readers and we're so happy to include this publication among the other ALA member benefits. We hope that *Booklist Reader* is useful and inspiring for every reader. Next time you're in the library, please take a moment to say hello and thank your library staff.

—George Kendall
gkendall@ala.org

Publisher

George Kendall

Editorial & Production

Donna Seaman, Editor in Chief and Editor, Adult Books

Susan Maguire, Senior Editor, Collection Management and Library Outreach

Annie Bostrom, Senior Editor, Adult Books

Sarah Hunter, Editor, Books for Youth

Julia Smith, Senior Editor, Books for Youth

Ronny Khuri, Senior Editor, Books for Youth

Kelly Ferreira, Associate Editor, Books for Youth

Heather Booth, Editor, Audio

Ben Segedin, Production Director

Carlos Orellana, Senior Production Editor

Michael Ruzicka, Operations Manager

Chris Anderson, Editorial Assistant

Abby McCabe, Editorial Assistant

Marketing

Grace Rosean, Marketing Manager

Biz Hyzy, Marketing Specialist and *Booklist Reader* Editor

Dan Kaplan, Subscriptions

Taylor Crossley, Marketing Coordinator

Cynthia Harden, Ad Traffic

Advertising Sales

Melissa Carr (704-491-7789)

Ryan King (773-414-9292)

Library Reads

Rebecca Vnuk, Executive Director

PBS Books

Heather-Marie Montilla, National Director

Booklist
Leading book discovery



Are you reading *Booklist Reader* digitally, but want it in print? Talk to your library, bookstore, or visit us online at booklistonline.com for more information.

Follow us on social:

Facebook, Bluesky, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube



About *Booklist*

Booklist is a book-review magazine that has been published by the American Library Association for more than 100 years and is widely viewed as offering the most reliable reviews to help libraries decide what to buy and to help library patrons and students decide what to read, view, or listen to.

Rights & Permissions

Libraries that subscribe to *Booklist* may post a link to *Booklist Reader* on their websites, in patron-facing newsletters, and other library-marketing materials. Individual pages of *Booklist Reader* and LibraryReads may be shared digitally. (Please include a link back to the full publication.)

Booklist Reader is supported by a generous grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Kindness Prevails

by Terry Hong

As we begin a new year, perhaps what we should all strive for is a bit more kindness to one another and to our own selves. Gift others and gift yourselves some of these sigh-inducing reminders of why kindness matters.

The Chinese Groove. By Kathryn Ma. 2022.

Counterpoint.

Bullied by his own family, 18-year-old Shelley is sent “away from this unhappy life and into a brighter world.” Relying on the titular Chinese groove that links even strangers as long as backgrounds overlap, Shelley lands in San Francisco to start anew with a “conveniently rich” uncle (who’s not). Shelley prevails, often aided by strangers, through English classes, boarding-house woes, homelessness, elder-, child-, and dog-care, app development, and more. By reconnecting broken bonds, Shelley attains the “Three Achievables . . . Family, Love, Fortune.”

Days at the Morisaki Bookshop. By Satoshi Yagisawa. Tr. by Eric Ozawa. 2023. HarperPerennial.

When Uncle Satoru offers to let Takako stay at the family bookshop after a debilitating breakup in exchange for opening the store in the mornings, she reluctantly agrees. In hindsight, she recalls, “without a doubt, that if not for those days, the rest of my life would have been bland, monotonous, and lonely.” Unconventional, third-generation bookseller Uncle Satoru of Tokyo’s book district has plenty to share, on and off the page, to restore his listless niece. Takako’s heartwarming bookish adventures continue in *More Days at the Morisaki Bookshop*.

The Great Passage. By Shion Miura. Tr. by Juliet Winters Carpenter. 2017. AmazonCrossing.

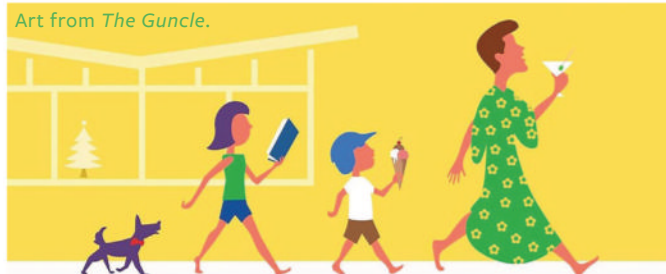
At 27, Majime is recruited from sales to the Dictionary Editorial Department of Gembu Books to help compile *The Great Passage*, an überdictionary destined to guide users across the vast sea of words. The socially awkward young man embarks on a journey of nearly two decades, during which he comes to understand the deepest meanings of friendship, dedication, and everlasting love. His coterie, which once included only his landlady and a tubby kitty, grows to include fellow eccentric linguaphiles, his soulmate chef, and other extraordinary colleagues.

The Guncle. By Steven Rowley. 2021. Putnam.

Once-upon-a-time TV star Patrick O’Hara hasn’t retired so much as he’s hiding out in Palm Springs. He’s never quite recovered from losing the love of his life to a drunk

driver, and now his best-friend-turned-sister-in-law, Sara, has died. Patrick’s widowed younger brother is headed to rehab after using pills to cope and entrusts his two beloved young children to GUP, that is, Gay Uncle Patrick, for 90 days. A transformative summer awaits: together, Patrick and his niblings each figure out how to re-enter the world with utter aplomb!

Art from *The Guncle*.



The Miracles of the Namiya General Store. By Keigo Higashino. Tr. by Sam Bett. 2019. Yen.

The Namiya General Store has been closed for decades when three delinquent young men break in seeking shelter. Inside, they discover that the store’s mail slot continues to clink with epistolary deliveries. Back in the day, this was “The General Store That Answers Your Woes,” where advice-seekers dropped missives in the front and retrieved thoughtful replies the next morning out back. Still-arriving letters impel the delinquents to answer. An Olympic hopeful, a struggling musician, the store owner and his son, a teenage runaway, and an ambitious orphan will prove instrumental in saving lost souls.

Sweet Bean Paste. By Durian Sukegawa. Tr. by Alison Watts. 2017. Oneworld.

Making and selling dorayaki—a pastry filled with the eponymous “sweet bean paste”—was not supposed to define Sentaro’s life, but his someday-dreams of becoming a writer got waylaid by bad decisions. He’s been repaying his debts as the dorayaki shop’s only employee, until 76-year-old Tokue answers the “Help Wanted” notice; her homemade sweet bean paste quickly makes her the shop’s best asset. But Tokue has a secret past, which causes her to quit, although not before customers are scared away by unfounded fears. Even from afar, Tokue shares important lessons with Sentaro about listening and learning before it’s too late.

Welcome to the Hyunam-dong Bookshop. By Hwang Bo-reum. Tr. by Shanna Tan. 2024. Bloomsbury.

Unsettled with what seemed to be a successful, contented life, Yeongju abandons both her career and marriage to open a bookstore. “As with everything in life, reading is about the right timing,” Yeongju ponders, considering how best to recommend titles to her customers. She recognizes fellow searching souls who become both employees and regular patrons. Sweet, hopeful, surprisingly insightful, this tale urges learning and understanding beyond its resonating pages.

Top 10

Romances

The very best romance novels from the past year combine humor and serious concerns, complications and joy in stories involving apps, food, screenplays, sports, and mysterious phenomena.

Curvy Girl Summer. By Danielle Allen. 2024. Tor Bramble.

Aaliyah's family is pressing her to lose weight and secure a boyfriend before she turns 30, so she tries a dating app at her favorite bar, prompting the kind bartender, Ahmed, to offer comfort and advice.

The Good Part. By Sophie Cousens. 2023. Putnam.

Lucy Young is 26 and sick of bad dates, a stagnant career, and weird roommates when she stumbles upon a wishing machine, wishes to skip to the good part, then wakes up in her forties, married with kids.

The Graham Effect. By Elle Kennedy. 2023. Sourcebooks/Bloom.

Kennedy kicks off a new series with Gigi Graham's determination to make it to the U.S. national women's hockey team, which induces her to seek help from moody co-captain Luke Ryder.

Just for the Summer. By Abby Jimenez. 2024. Forever.

Every woman who dates Justin immediately finds her romantic soulmate after breaking up with him. Emma has the same problem. But what if Emma and Justin were to date each other?

The Pairing. By Casey McQuiston. 2024. St. Martin's/Griffin.

Theo and Kit broke up right before embarking on a Eu-

ropean food and wine tour. Four years later, Theo, now a sommelier, and Kit, a pastry chef in Paris, separately decide to finally make the trip. What could go right?

Pride and Preston Lin. By Christina Hwang Dudley. 2024. Third State.

While working in her family's restaurant, Lissie Cheng messes up, and the negative reaction of handsome and wealthy Preston Lin damages their business. Yet somehow Preston and Lissie end up getting to know each other in this fresh take on Austen's classic.

The Rom-Commers. By Katherine Center. 2024. St. Martin's.

Emma Wheeler gave up hope for a screenwriting career after her father's accident, but when her high-school boyfriend, now a Hollywood manager, tells her that her screenwriting hero, Charlie Yates, needs a collaborator, Emma heads to Los Angeles.

A Run at Love. By Toni Shiloh. 2024. Bethany House.

Piper McKinney is determined to become the first Black female champion racehorse owner, and expert trainer Tuck Hale can help. But would working together jeopardize their friendship, or, worse, her dream of them becoming something more?

Simply the Best. By Susan Elizabeth Phillips. 2024. Avon.

Sports-agent Brett Rivers' client, football-legend Clint, is the lead suspect in his ex-girlfriend's death, and his sister, Rory, is determined to prove him innocent in this witty and suspenseful addition to Phillips' Chicago Stars series.

Slow Dance. By Rainbow Rowell. 2024. Morrow.

Divorced, nearing 40, and living in her childhood home with her mom and two kids, grammar-school drama teacher Shiloh heads to a wedding, hoping to see Cary, but will they be able to transcend their past and, finally, dance into love?

Art from *Just for the Summer*.



Top 10

Debut Romances

The most scintillating novels by first-time romance writers during the last year sparkle with intriguing characters navigating predicaments heart-wrenching and hilarious on their way to love.

Birding with Benefits. By Sarah T. Dubb. 2024. Gallery.

Celeste thought John was looking for romance, but he needs a partner for the Arizona Ornithological Society's upcoming Bird Binge contest in Dubb's witty debut of love human and avian.

Don't Want You Like a Best Friend. By Emma R. Alban. 2024. Avon.

Beth Demeroven meets Gwen Bertram during her first London season and Gwen's fourth, and soon friendship deepens into romance as they scheme to bring Gwen's father and Beth's mother together.

The Emperor and the Endless Palace. By Justinian Huang. 2024. MIRA.

Huang's queer incarnation romance mixes historical fiction, folklore, erotica, and fantasy across three time lines, from ancient China to modern-day Los Angeles, in a unique tale of love, power, betrayal, and loyalty.

The Ex-Mas Holidays. By Zoe Allison. 2023. Berkley.

For recently laid-off Maya Bashir, the only thing worse about having to move back home for the holidays is working as a ski instructor alongside Sam Holland, who dumped her on the slopes eight years ago.

How to End a Love Story. By Yulin Kuang. 2024. Avon.

Screenwriter Grant Shepard is offered a spot on the TV adaptation of the best-selling Ivy Papers books, but he has a painful connection to the author, Helen Zhang.

Kilt Trip. By Alexandra Kiley. 2024. Canary Street.

Travel consultant Addie Macrae has plenty of ideas to help revive the family-owned, financially floundering Heart of the Highlands tours, but Logan, a hottie in a kilt, objects to them all in this sexy battle of wits.

A Lady's Guide to Marvels and Misadventure. By Angela Bell. 2024. Bethany House.

In Bell's whimsical, faith-based, Victorian romance, Clara is worried about the status of her lovably quirky family, especially after her clockmaker grandfather flies over London in a mechanical owl. Can his annoyingly cheerful apprentice help?

Art from *One Night in Hartswood*.



The Next Best Fling. By Gabriella Gamez. 2024. Forever.

Never would librarian Marcela Ortiz imagine that she had something in common with Theo Young, but both relatably messy protagonists have suffered unrequited love in Gamez's delightful tale of body positivity and the joy of books.

One Night in Hartswood. By Emma Denny. 2023. HarperCollins/Mills & Boon.

In Denny's vibrant medieval love story, hunter and tracker Raff is searching the forest for a missing groom and encounters Penn. Both men feel an immediate spark of attraction, but is giving into temptation worth all the risks?

Say You'll Be Mine. By Naina Kumar. 2024. Dell.

Discouraged by a wedding invitation, middle-school teacher Meghna Raman decides to seek an arranged marriage, just as engineer Karthik Murthy, who intends never to marry, agrees to meet possible brides to please his parents, leading to a fake engagement in Kumar's involving romance.

Art from *You're the Problem, It's You*.

You Are My Sunshine

by John Charles

A variation on the opposites-attract trope, grumpy/sunshine romances have been popular with readers for decades (though a case can be made that *Pride and Prejudice* is the original grumpy/sunshine romance). The versatility of this theme means it can be adapted to almost any romance subgenre, and authors can approach this type of romance in a number of different ways. Some grumpy/sunshine romances employ a more lighthearted and humorous tone, such as Alexandria Bellefleur's *Written in the Stars* and Tessa Bailey's *It Happened One Summer*. In other grumpy/sunshine love stories, the initial grumpiness on the part of one character may mask a deeper, more serious issue, as is the case with Alexis Hall's *Glitterland* and Kacen Callender's *Stars in Your Eyes*. One thing that remains consistent across this spectrum of romances, however, is the power of love to transform lives.

Beach Read. By Emily Henry. 2020. Berkley.

While summering at neighboring beach houses, romance author January Andrews and literary-fiction writer Augustus Everett—both suffering from writer's block—agree to switch genres for their next work-in-progress.

The Blooming of Delphinium. By Holly Varni. 2024. Revell.

Flower-shop owner Delphinium Hayes' special talent for matchmaking is put to the test when she finds herself attracted to two different men: Mason McCormack and Elliot Sturgis.

The Bride Test. By Helen Hoang. 2019. Berkley.

Because of his autism, Khai Diep comes across as cold and emotionless, but his matchmaking mother hopes Esme Tran will be the woman who can unlock Khai's heart.

Delilah Green Doesn't Care. By Ashley Herring Blake. 2022. Berkley.

While playing photographer at her stepsister's wedding, Delilah Green finds herself falling for bridesmaid Claire Sutherland.

Glitterland. By Alexis Hall. 2023. Sourcebooks Casablanca.

Writer Ash Winters' professional and personal downward spiral is disrupted by the arrival in his life of full-of-good-cheer Darian Taylor.

It Happened One Summer. By Tessa Bailey. 2021. Avon.

As far as sea captain Brendan Taggart is concerned, the last thing the sleepy little town of Westport needs is Hollywood socialite Piper Bellinger.

The Love Hypothesis. By Ali Hazelwood. 2021. Berkley.

To convince her friends that she is over a romantic break-up, Stanford PhD candidate Olive Smith cooks up a fake-dating scheme with irascible Professor Adam Carlsen.

Meddling with Mistletoe. By Liz Johnson. 2024. Revell.

While trying to sell her pies at the Christmas market, Whitney Garrett finds herself becoming entangled in various efforts to play matchmaker for Daniel Franklin.

The Ride of Her Life. By Jennifer Dugan. 2024. Avon.

Molly McDaniels plans to sell the horse farm she inherited from her estranged aunt, but she encounters an unexpected roadblock in the person of grumpy farrier Shani Thomas.

The Romantic Agenda. By Claire Kann. 2022. Berkley.

Joy has been in love with her best friend, Malcolm, forever, but he only wants to be with Summer. Can Joy, with help from Summer's best friend, Fox, find a way to break the couple up so that Malcolm will finally be hers?

Say You'll Be Mine. By Naina Kumar. 2024. Dell.

The fake engagement Meghna Raman and Karthik Murthy come up with to keep their matchmaking parents at bay quickly turns into something very real and romantic.

Stars in Your Eyes. By Kacen Callender. 2023. Forever.

To generate some much-needed PR buzz for their up-

coming movie, Hollywood bad-boy Logan Gray and up-and-coming star Mattie Cole agree to fake-date.

The Tourist Attraction. By Sarah Morgenthaler. 2020. Sourcebooks Casablanca.

Grumpy diner owner Graham Barnett hates tourists. So, why is he suddenly offering to be vacationing waitress Zoey Caldwell's tour guide while she is in Moose Springs?

The Wall of Winnipeg and Me. By Mariana Zapata. 2023. Avon.

Two years of working as the personal assistant to soccer-star Aiden Graves, the legendary Wall of Winnipeg, was enough for Vanessa Mazur. So, why does she say "yes" when Aiden asks her to come back?

When Grumpy Met Sunshine. By Charlotte Stein. 2024. Griffin.

Working with grumpy ex-footballer Alfie Harding on his autobiography, and then pretending to be his girlfriend, brings out the best and worst in ghostwriter Mabel Willicker.

Written in the Stars. By Alexandria Bellefleur. 2020. Avon.

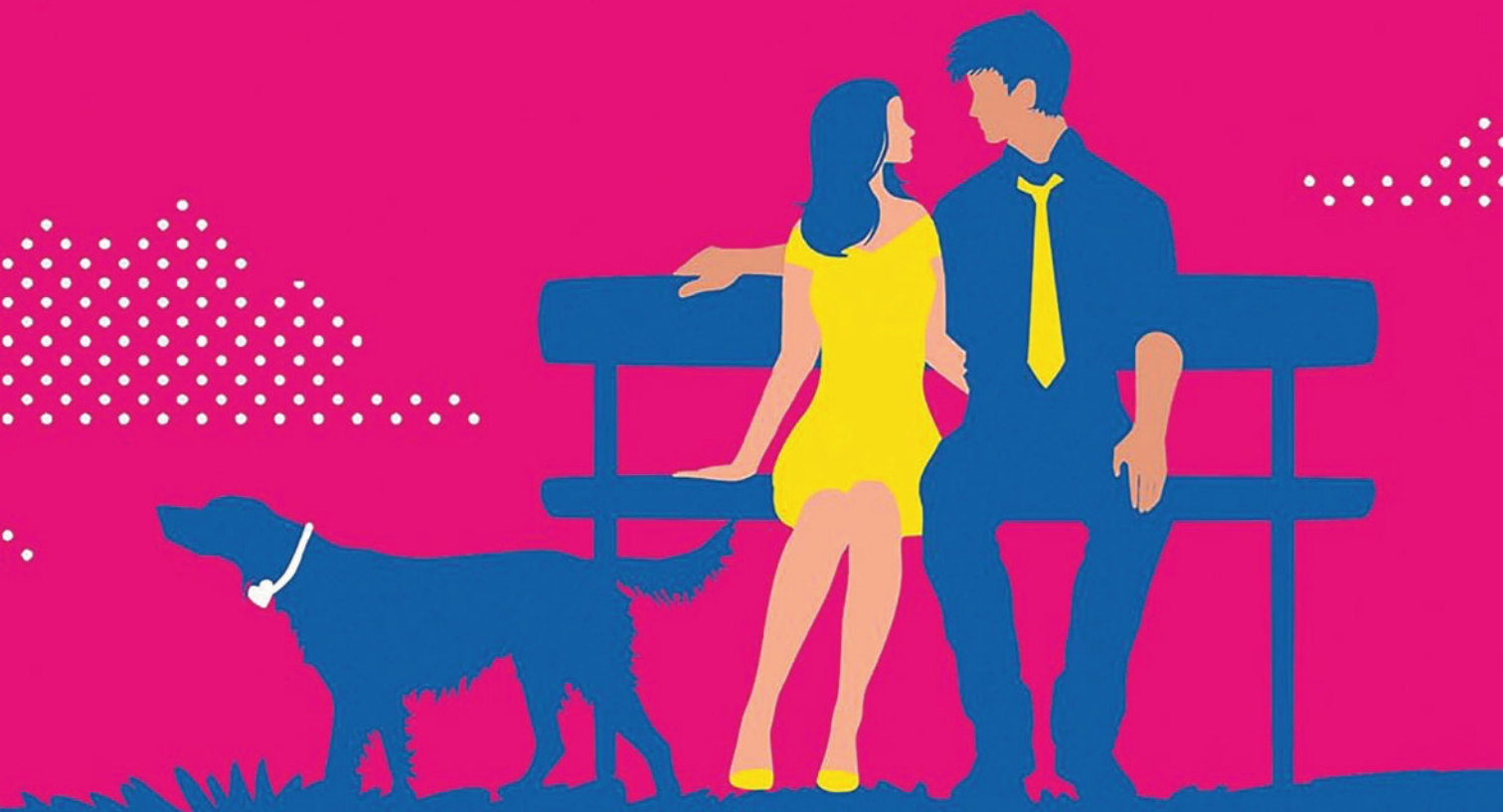
Astrologist Elle Jones and insurance actuary Darcy Lowell agree to fake-date to keep their families happy, but neither one expected they would actually want to keep their romance going for themselves.

You're the Problem, It's You. By Emma R. Alban. 2024. Avon.

Bobby Mason thought showing James Demeroven around London might be fun, until Bobby meets James and discovers what a great big grump he is.



Art from *When Grumpy Met Sunshine*



Art from *The Happy Ever After Playlist*.

Read-alikes

They Call It Puppy (and Kitty) Love

By John Charles

Pets make everything better and that includes romance novels. Whether they precipitate a meet-cute between their humans or illuminate the loving and caring side of a character who might otherwise come across as cold and unfeeling, pets can play an important role in advancing a romance between two people who might remain romantically clueless without a little help from their furry best friends.

Fall for Him. By Andie Burke. 2024. Griffin.

A plumbing disaster sends Dylan Gallagher through the flooded floor of his apartment and into the bed of his hostile downstairs neighbor, Derek Chang, and the dog he is secretly taking care of.

The Happy Ever After Playlist. By Abby Jimenez. 2020. Forever.

After unsuccessfully trying to locate the adorable mutt's owner, Sloan Monroe brings Tucker into her home and heart, but what will happen when Tucker's owner, musician Jason Larsen, finally returns her messages?

I Hate You More. By Lucy Gilmore. 2021. Sourcebooks Casablanca.

Ruby Taylor helps her old friend out by showing Weezy in the Canine Classic dog competition, but grumpy judge Spencer Wilson thinks Ruby should stick to beauty pageants.

Pardon My Frenchie. By Farrah Rochon. 2024. Forever.

When Thaddeus Sims threatens to break up the successful social media act Ashanti Wright has built between her French bulldog, Duchess, and his canine bestie, Puddin', can Ashanti get Thaddeus to sit and stay?

Like Cats & Dogs. By Lizzie Shane. 2024. Forever.

For 10 years, Mackenzie “Mac” Newton has been the bane of Magda Miller’s existence. If Mac’s obnoxious tabby named Cat isn’t muscling his way into Magda’s apartment and upsetting her beloved pit bull, Cupcake, then Mac is exploiting, for his own business advantage, his illicit appropriation of her grandmother’s recipe for maple cake. So when Magda gets the chance to get out of Pine Hollow, Vermont, and away from Mac by becoming a contestant on her favorite show of all time, *The Great American Cake-Off*, she can’t say yes fast enough. There is just one little thing the show’s producers failed to share with Magda; this show is a very special “Arch Rivals” episode, and Mac just happens to be her rival baker! In the latest impeccably crafted addition to her puppy-filled Pine Hollow series, following *Four Weddings and a Puppy* (2024), Shane deftly sifts all the delicious whimsy and charm of *The Great British Baking Show* into a scrumptiously sweet romance that is enhanced with two dueling pets and just the right dash of zesty humor. —*John Charles*



St. Francis Society for Wayward Pets. By Annie England Noblin. 2020. Morrow.

Maeve Stevens didn’t just inherit her mother’s home in Timber Creek, she is now also in charge of a marauding cat, an abandoned bulldog, and a group of women who knit sweaters for the dogs and cats under their care.

To Marry and To Meddle. By Martha Waters. 2022. Atria.

Julian Belfry and Emily Turner’s marriage of convenience quickly becomes quite inconvenient. Feline-fancier romance readers will especially enjoy Emily’s kitten, Cecil Lucifer Beelzebub Turner-Belfry.

The Worst Duke in London. By Amalie Howard. 2024. Forever.

For financial reasons of his own, Gage Croft, Duke of Vale, must convince country-loving (and animal-loving)

Evangeline Raine to accompany her younger sister to London.

Worst In Show. By Anna E. Collins. 2024. Forever.

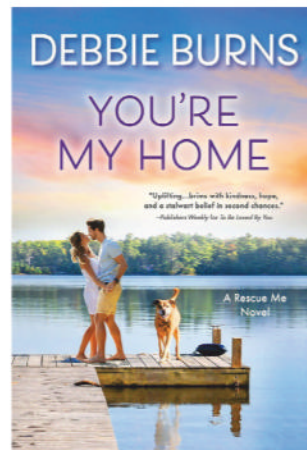
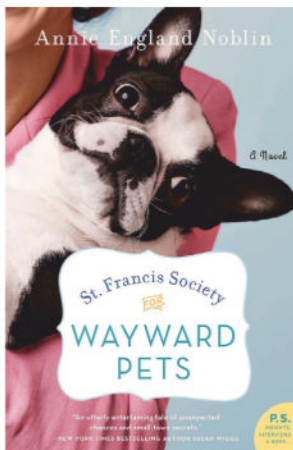
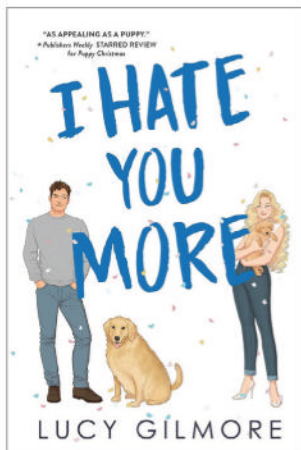
To save her grandfather’s pet shop, Cora enters one of his dogs in the Winter Fest canine competition, but rival pet-store owner Leo is equally determined that his dog will be best in show.

You Lucky Dog. By Julia London. 2020. Berkley.

Romantic sparks fly when their dog walker accidentally switches Carla Kennedy’s foster basset hound, Baxter, with Max Sheffington’s basset hound, Hazel.

You’re My Home. By Debbie Burns. 2023. Sourcebooks Casablanca.

Riley Leighton teams up with Levi Duncan to keep the High Grove Animal Shelter from closing in the latest of Burns’ Rescue Me romances.



10 Questions

Katy James

by John Charles

Katy James writes contemporary romance books that get to the heart of falling in love while finding one's place in today's world. When not writing, she works as an archivist and rare book librarian.

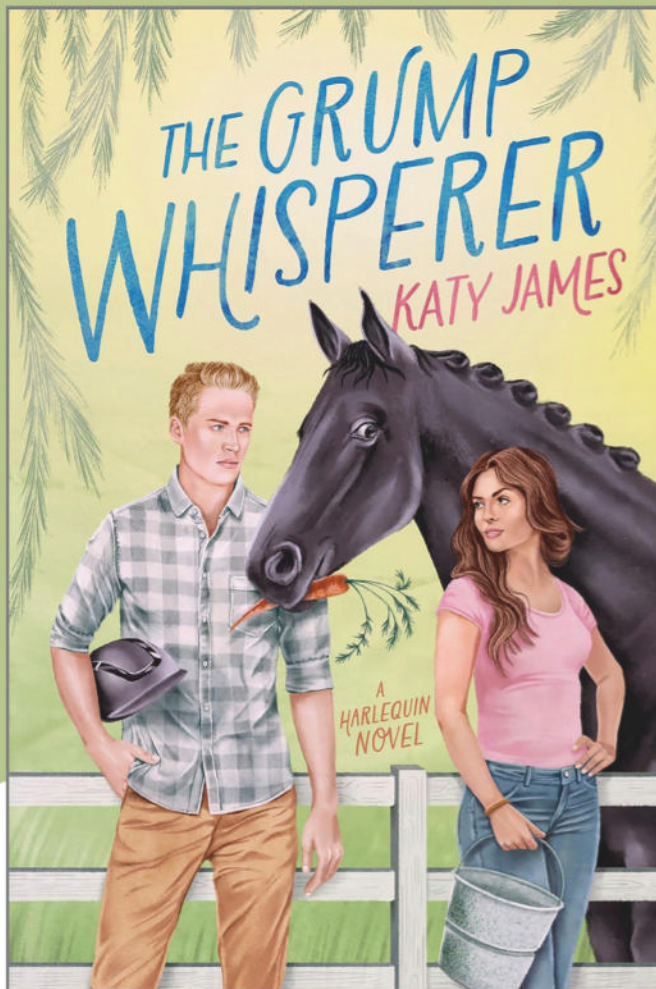


1. *Who is Katy James when she is at home?*

When I'm at home, I'm a homebody! I live in an old house I renovated in a cute historic town, and if I could just stay home every day, I'd be happy. But I do have a non-writer career that takes up most of my time, working as an archivist and a rare-book librarian at a large university. I'm also a single mom, a cat and dog parent, a runner, dancer, gardener, tarot card reader, and general putterer around too many hobbies.

2. *What would you like readers to know about *The Grump Whisperer*?*

I'd like all the horse girls (gender neutral) out there to know that this book is for them. So many of us grew up reading horse-girl books, whether it was *Misty of Chincoteague*, *The Black Stallion*, the Saddle Club series, or my favorite, the Jinny of Finmory series. But horsey books for adults, especially for romance lovers, are few and far between. That's why I wanted to write this one, and I hope that other former horse-girl book lovers will find and enjoy it.



3. What five words best describe *The Grump Whisperer*?

That's a tough one, but I'd say funny, poignant, low-angst, sexy, and most of all, horsey!

4. You write thoughtfully and insightfully about the relationship between humans and horses in *The Grump Whisperer*. Have you always been a fan of all things horsey?

Absolutely. I was born obsessed with horses, much to my parents' chagrin. I begged my mother for years to let me take riding lessons, and she finally gave in when I was nine. Because I've never owned my own horse but instead have ridden dozens of horses over many years, I really grew to understand just how individual horses are, how they all have completely different personalities and different relationships with the humans who care for and ride them.

5. What do you think it is about the grumpy/sunshine romance trope that makes it so irresistible to so many readers?

Grumpy/sunshine is probably my favorite trope both to read and to write. I think there's something about the friction between two different people with two different outlooks on life and the deliciousness of watching them discover that the difference is what makes them perfect for each other, rather than opposites who can never get along. Also, it's a great setup for banter and sexual tension.

6. What are the books that made you fall in love with romance fiction as a reader?

I honestly don't remember the first romance I read, probably because I was about 10 years old when I read it. My mother was a huge romance fan and kept a basket of paperback romances in the kitchen. She was a children's librarian and firmly believed that everyone should read whatever they wanted, whether or not someone else might consider it "appropriate." So, I dug into her book basket early and never really stopped. I do remember reading romances by Elizabeth Lowell, Kay Hooper, Iris Johansen, and of course, Nora Roberts. All absolute queens of the genre.

7. What role have libraries played in your life?

A big one, obviously! One of my earliest memories is of my mother volunteering in my school library, and another is of going with her to Simmons College, where she got her library degree. And then years later, I also went to Simmons for the same degree, although our careers were very different—she worked as an elementary-school librarian for over 20 years, and I've been an archivist and rare-book librarian for even longer. Libraries of all kinds are central to our society, because they provide essential services as well as sparking intellectual curiosity and creativity in people from all walks of life.

8. What is the best piece of life advice you have ever been given?

The best advice has always come from my mother, but much of it isn't appropriate to print. She was a character. I think one of the most useful pieces of advice I've received is that when deciding what to do about something, the answer isn't really to do what will make you "happy." It's about what choice is the most authentic to who you are and to what you believe to be right—regardless of any short-term happiness, unhappiness, or how difficult the decision and its result might be.

9. What is next for you as an author?

I'm happy to report that I'm almost finished writing the next book in the Morning Song Farm series, *The Hero Renovation*, which should be out late next year. After that, I'd love to write more horse-related romances. But of course, like most writers, I have too many ideas and not enough time. So, we'll see!

10. How can readers learn more about you and your books?

I'm on most social media (Instagram, Threads, X, and Bluesky) at @katyjameswriter. I also keep my website up to date about my books, where to buy them, and any interviews or events I'm doing: www.katyjameswriter.com. And I have an occasional email newsletter as well, which people can sign up for on my website.

Recent Business Books

by Donna Seaman

From the practical to the historic, the infuriating to the inspirational, these outstanding business titles address everyday concerns and illuminate the countless complexities and paradoxes of the larger business world.

The Art of Small Business Social Media: A Blueprint for Marketing Success. By Peg Fitzpatrick. 2024. Rowman & Littlefield.

Best-selling author Fitzpatrick delivers a supremely useful book on using social media to promote small businesses, analyzing numerous social media platforms, focusing on how to captivate audiences, and providing a blueprint for a successful online presence.

Design Your Life: Your Career, Your Way. By Erifili Gounari. 2024. Kogan Page.

Riding a wave of paradigm-shifting changes, Gounari delivers concrete advice targeting Gen Zers striving to find their place in the business world. Addressing the explosion of social media platforms alongside the shift away from “in-office” to a more flexible work life, this book guides readers to prioritize, reflect, and plan to travel the career path of their dreams.

Dream Chasing: My Four Decades of Success and Failure with Walt Disney Imagineering. By Bob Weis. 2024. Disney Editions.

Disney lovers will revel in this vivid behind-the-scenes tale from Disney creator Weis. He served as an Imagineer, which, as Disney describes, is the “creative engine that designs and builds Disney theme parks, games, products” and more. In his expansive career, Weis has led or been an

integral part of many high-profile projects including *Star Wars* attractions, themed cruise ships, the Shanghai Disney resort, and other iconic Disney experiences.

Feel-Good Finance: Untangle Your Relationship with Money for Better Mental, Emotional, and Financial Well-Being. By Aja Evans. 2024. BenBella.

Financial therapist Evans offers basic budget planning and money management advice, while the primary focus is on understanding mental health as she writes with empathy about the devastating impact of financial anxiety, stress, and mismanagement and offers proactive and practical remedies.

Gambling Man: The Secret Story of the World’s Greatest Disruptor, Masayoshi Son. By Lionel Barber. 2025. Atria.

Barber presents a meticulously researched, balanced, thoroughly readable, utterly dizzying insider’s account of SoftBank founder/CEO Masayoshi “Masa” Son, born an ethnic Korean in Japan in the humblest of circumstances, only to become one of the planet’s most influential investors and richest men.

Make Money Move: A Guide to Financial Wellness. By Lauren Simmons. 2023. Amistad.

Simmons presents comprehensive guidance, moving beyond financial markets, where she has extensive experience, to include wellness, mindset, and career goals. Add to that valuable equation the much-needed voice of a woman of color and we have a gold mine for anyone seeking to achieve financial aspirations, whether focused on buying a vacation home or looking toward retirement and establishing generational wealth.

Art from *She-Wolves*.

Making Hybrid Working Work: A Practical Guide for Business Success. By Gary Cookson. 2025. Kogan Page.

Cookson, founder of a consultancy that focuses on workplace performance, offers guidance on “how to make hybrid working work more effectively.” His advice, based on research and experience, directs managers and leaders on successfully managing hybrid work while focusing on changing culture from onsite thinking to developing teams and virtual visibility.

Mother / Founder: 68 Women on the Trials and Triumphs of Starting a Business and Raising a Family. By Amanda Jane Jones and Jennifer Fernandez. 2024. Artisan.

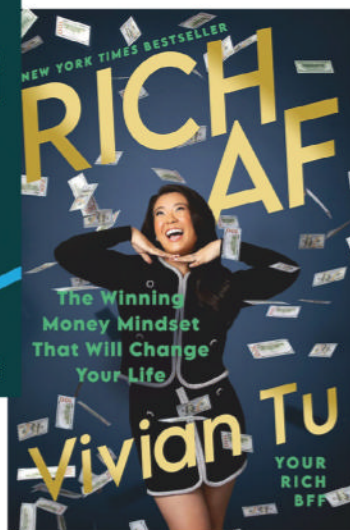
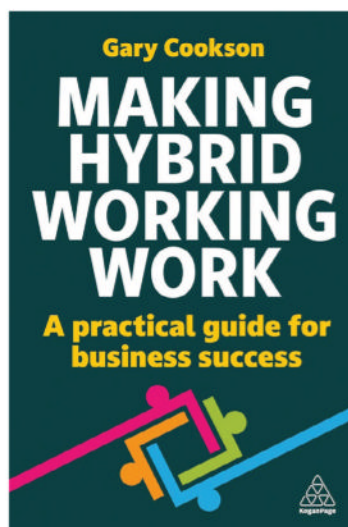
This enjoyable book contains over 60 two-page profiles of women who have successfully achieved mother/founder status. Each profile covers the individual’s journey from idea to fruition, sharing the challenges and solutions experienced along the way, making this relevant to entrepreneurial-minded women across socioeconomic demographics.

The Nonprofit Dilemma: Insights & Strategies for Purpose-Driven Leaders. By D. C. Armijo. 2024. Milford.

Nonprofit organizations function much like for-profit businesses, but while businesses can focus exclusively on making a profit, nonprofits are also dedicated to positively impacting the social good identified in their organizational mission. Often those two demands are in conflict, and it is at this intersection that Armijo steps in to offer clarity.

Play Nice: The Rise, Fall, and Future of Blizzard Entertainment. By Jason Schreier. 2024. Grand Central.

Blizzard Entertainment, known for *World of Warcraft*, *Diablo*, and other popular games, was founded by two friends more than 30 years ago and raked in billions of dollars, but it became entangled in lawsuits, culture problems, and a hostile takeover. Schreier delivers a scrupulously fact-checked history and analysis that will fascinate everyone interested in the world of gaming.



Rich AF: The Winning Money Mindset That Will Change Your Life. By Vivian Tu. 2023. Portfolio.

Ex-Wall Street trader, former BuzzFeed sales partner, and financial-literacy-content creator Tu acts as an everyman’s financial advisor, sharing what she learned from being in the business, working with a mentor, and facing opposition in the financial industry. She wants everyone to know the secrets to getting wealthy by using the tactics of the ultrarich and offers doable action items.

She-Wolves: The Untold History of Women on Wall Street. By Paulina Bren. 2024. Norton.

Bren portrays women finance pioneers, aka the She-Wolves, from Jane Larkin, one of the first Wall Street research analysts and partners, to the late, well-known Muriel Siebert, who bought a seat on the NYSE, to women involved in the debacle of Boesky and Milken and the tragedy of 9/11. Irreverence and humor spice Bren’s searing account.

Taxes 101: From Understanding Forms and Filing to Using Tax Laws and Policies to Minimize Costs and Maximize Wealth, an Essential Primer on the U.S. Tax System. By Michele Cagan. 2024. Adams Media.

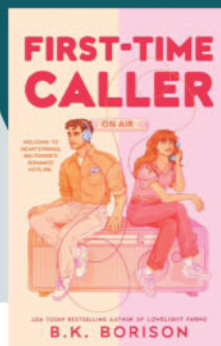
Written by a CPA, this comprehensive primer elucidates the U.S. tax system, beginning with a history of tax policies, then addressing the individual tax return and small-business tax returns, with detailed guidance on deductions, tax brackets and the marginal tax rate, estimated tax-payment requirements, the AMT (alternative minimum tax), money-saving strategies, and tax-return preparation and filing.



February 2025

The Top Ten Adult Fiction and Nonfiction Chosen Monthly by America's Library Staff

Find out more at www.LibraryReads.org



First-Time Caller
B.K. Borison
(Berkley)

A cute story about Lucie, whose daughter calls into a radio show for people looking for love. Aiden, the show's host, is taken by her honesty and invites her to the show to document her quest for love. It's a bumpy ride, but Aiden is there the whole way! Readers will love the tension between Lucie and Aiden, and the secondary characters are chef's kiss.

—Claire Schroeder, Cincinnati and Hamilton County Public Library, OH

Novelist read-alike: *Is She Really Going Out With Him?* by Sophie Cousens



Wooing the Witch Queen
Stephanie Burgis
(Bramble)

This cozy romance features a librarian hiding out as a dark wizard, a witch queen who'd rather nerd out about experiments, and the most wonderfully supportive found family. This has all the tropes you love of romantasy with the added bonus of witty banter, snarky witch queens, and a heart-melting romance. Give this one to fans of *The Princess Bride*.

—Sarah Bean Thompson, Springfield-Greene Cty Library, MO
Novelist read-alike: *Sword Crossed* by Freya Marske



The Quiet Librarian
Allen Eskens
(Mulholland Books)

Hana, a librarian in a small town in Minnesota, lives a quiet life until the day a detective informs her of her close friend's murder. Knowing her friend's death is tied to her, Hana's afraid she's next. This historical thriller alternates between present day and 1995 Bosnia with a plot that's intense and gritty, and writing that's moving and heartbreaking.

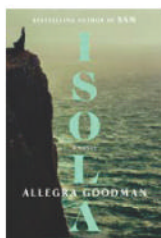
—Connie Laing, Great River Regional Library, MN
Novelist read-alike: *Groundskeeping* by Lee Cole



Victorian Psycho
Virginia Feito
(Liveright)

Dark and diabolical, this is a tale of a governess pushed to the limit. Arriving at an estate to care for two spoiled brats, she must deal with a barrage of verbal and physical abuse, until Christmas arrives and she can take it no more. This gruesome gothic tale full of dark wit and horror is reminiscent of *Sweeney Todd*.

—Kimberly McGee, Lake Travis Community Library, Austin, TX
Novelist read-alike: *Maeve Fly* by CJ Leede



Isola: A Novel
Allegra Goodman
(The Dial Press)

This novel is based on the true story of Marguerite de la Rocque, an aristocratic French girl who was marooned with her lover on an island off of Canada in the 1500s. When her parents pass away, she's entrusted to a guardian who seeks adventure and uses her fortune to finance his travels. Readers will enjoy her adventures as she makes a new life.

—Claire Talbot, Greece Public Library, Rochester, NY
Novelist read-alike: *Vaster Wilds* by Lauren Groff



I Got Abducted by Aliens and Now I'm Trapped in a Rom-Com
Kimberly Lemming
(Berkley)

When Dory Valentine is abducted and transported to another planet, she ends up falling for not one, but two sexy aliens. As you might expect, this book is funny, sexy, and very fast-paced. The subplot about her alien abduction—and the reasons behind it—is interesting and intricate. Readers will absolutely look forward to more from this up-and-coming author.

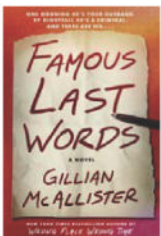
—Dontanà M., Oak Park Public Library, IL
Novelist read-alike: *Ice Planet Barbarians* by Ruby Dixon



A Killing Cold
Kate Alice Marshall
(Flatiron Books)

When Theo arrives at her new fiancé's family retreat, she realizes she has been there before. As the secrets this family has been holding onto for years start to come out, this drama goes in a dark, suspenseful direction. Just when you think you know where this is headed, it becomes full of twists and turns. Yes please!

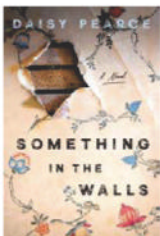
—Paige N., LibraryReads Ambassador
Novelist read-alike: *The Last One at the Wedding* by Jason Rekulak



Famous Last Words
Gillian McAllister
(William Morrow)

Cam can't believe it when her husband Adam takes three hostages in an abandoned warehouse. Seven years later, Adam's betrayal rears its ugly head again. Will Cam turn to amateur sleuthing, or put everything behind her and find closure? McAllister uses her standard smooth and emotional style to make sure all the puzzle pieces click together for a satisfying ending.

—Cari Dubiel, Twinsburg Public Library, OH
Novelist read-alike: *The Last Thing He Told Me* by Laura Dave



Something in the Walls
Daisy Pearce
(Minotaur Books)

Mina, a newly minted child psychologist, meets Sam, a journalist, who seeks her help on a piece about Alice, a teenager who claims to be possessed by a witch. Mina agrees, and they find themselves in a very unsettling small town, experiencing strange things that they can't explain. This book is just spooky enough that you may want to read it with the lights on!

—Melissa Turner, Maricopa Library & Cultural Center, AZ
Novelist read-alike: *The Bog Wife* by Kay Chronister



The Strange Case of Jane O.: A Novel
Karen Thompson Walker
(Random House)

After Dr. Henry Byrd is summoned by police to see Jane O. at the psychiatric hospital, they want him to reveal her confidential information: has she really lost three days under a dissociative fugue, or is she faking it to cover up a crime? This unique novel explores the idea of alternate and parallel realities, grief, friendship, and trust.

—Donna Ballard, LibraryReads Ambassador
Novelist read-alike: *The Possibilities* by Yael Goldstein

Bonus pick:



A Forty Year Kiss
Nickolas Butler
(Sourcebooks Landmark)

Notable Nonfiction:



Fearless and Free: A Memoir
Josephine Baker
(Tiny Reparations Books)

Be sure to check out our social media for the Bonus Pick annotations!

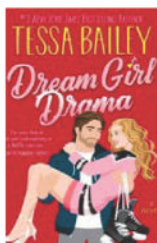
Made in LibraryAware - www.libraryaware.com



February 2025

HALL OF FAME TITLES

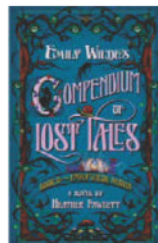
The LibraryReads Hall of Fame designation honors authors who have had multiple titles appear on the monthly list since 2013.



Dream Girl Drama
Tessa Bailey
(Avon)



The Queens of Crime:
A Novel
Marie Benedict
(St. Martin's Press)



Emily Wilde's Compendium
of Lost Tales
Heather Fawcett
(Del Rey)



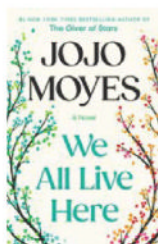
Back After This: A Novel
Linda Holmes
(Ballantine Books)



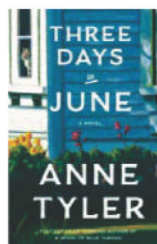
Swordheart
T. Kingfisher
(Bramble)



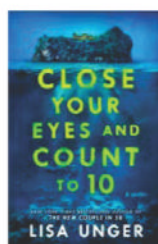
The Bones Beneath My Skin
TJ Klune
(Tor Books)



We All Live Here: A Novel
Jojo Moyes
(Pamela Dorman Books)



Three Days in June: A Novel
Anne Tyler
(Knopf)



Close Your Eyes and
Count to 10
Lisa Unger
(Park Row)

Find out more at www.LibraryReads.org/HOF

Reserve These Reads

Adult

Get your hands on these hotly anticipated books, all out this month.

Fiction

Bonded in Death. By J. D. Robb. St. Martin's.

In Robb's sixtieth (!) futuristic crime story, the body of a former fighter from the Urban Wars is discovered with NYPD Lieutenant Eve Dallas' business card in his hand. What follows is a compelling battle of wits that will thrill fans of the series.

The Bones beneath My Skin. By TJ Klune. Tor.

Readers who know Klune from *The House in the Cerulean Sea* will want to pick up this fantasy about three unlikely characters who end up in a remote Oregon cabin where dark forces are threatening to converge.

Last Twilight in Paris. By Pam Jenoff. Park Row.

Jenoff (*Code Name Sapphire*, 2023) uses two time lines to tell a tale full of danger, mystery, and love, based on the true story of a department store in Paris that was turned into a Nazi prison camp.



The Queens of Crime. By Marie Benedict. St. Martin's.

In 1930s London, the five greatest female crime writers (led by Dorothy L. Sayers) are struggling to be taken seriously by the all-male writers in the Detection Club, so they set out to solve a real-life murder in the latest from historical-fiction star Benedict.

Three Days in June. By Anne Tyler. Knopf.

A new novel from best-selling, Pulitzer Prize-winning Tyler is always a treat, and this one follows the socially awkward mother of the bride who must contend with the arrival of her ex-husband and a secret about her future son-in-law on the eve of her daughter's wedding.

Nonfiction

Fearless and Free. By Josephine Baker. Penguin/Tiny Reparations.

Published in France in 1949, the memoir of the legendary Baker—dancer, singer, activist, spy—will be available for the first time for U.S. readers.

Memorial Days: A Memoir. By Geraldine Brooks. Viking.

Brooks (*Horse*, 2022) chronicles her “memorial days” on a remote, wild, and beautiful island off the coast of her home country, Australia, where she is finally able to mourn for her husband, writer Tony Horwitz, after having kept up a brave front in the immediate aftermath of his sudden, wholly unexpected death.

Source Code: My Beginnings. By Bill Gates. Knopf.

Gates' memoir promises to be not about the author's well-known career in tech and philanthropy, but rather about the man behind all of that, beginning with his childhood.



Art from *The Bones beneath My Skin*.

Top 10

Romances on Audio

It's contemporary romance across the board in this year's top 10 romances on audio!

Birding with Benefits. By Sarah T. Dubb. Read by Mia Hutchinson-Shaw and Evan Sibley. 2024. Simon & Schuster Audio.

Enthusiastic Celeste and reserved John team up as real birdwatching partners and fake lovers, at first. Each narrator is able to voice the other character in dialogue and balance the characters' sometimes clashing energies.

Expiration Dates. By Rebecca Serle. Read by Julia Whelan. 2024. Simon & Schuster Audio.

Marvelous character development of supporting players adds to the enchantment of this magical realism-tinged romance. Voiced by award-winning narrator Julia Whelan, this audiobook is simply flawless.

Funny Story. By Emily Henry. Read by Julia Whelan. 2024. Books on Tape.

Henry's romances are some of the most popular around, and Julia Whelan proves once again why she is one of the best romance narrators. She expresses the story's sorrow, grief, love, and humor with precision and grace.

Here We Go Again. By Alison Cochrun. Read by Natalie Naudus and Jeremy Carlisle Parker. 2024. Simon & Schuster Audio.

Estranged childhood best friends reconnect during a road trip with their terminally ill teacher that will test the limits of their patience and may just lead them back to each other. Compelling narration captures clashing personalities and leads to a few tear-jerking moments.

Just One Taste. By Lizzy Dent. Read by Sarah Sampino. 2024. Books on Tape.

Sampino's wonderful performance adds depth to this slow-burn food-infused romance while bringing the lush Italian culture to life. Her changes in accent to highlight the Italian characters are superb.

Lies and Weddings. By Kevin Kwan. Read by Jing Lusi. 2024. Books on Tape.

British actor Lusi expertly takes the mic, having already embodied the *Crazy Rich Asians* experience on film. Versatile, vibrant Lusi will make you believe in true love, not to mention real wealth.

Mr. and Mrs. Witch. By Gwenda Bond. Read by Luke Daniels and Amy Landon. 2023. Spotify Audiobooks.

Veteran narrators take on alternating chapters and both skillfully portray Savannah and Griffin, who find out on their wedding day that they are fated enemies. An amusing, fast-paced, paranormal romance.

Slow Dance. By Rainbow Rowell. Read by Rebecca Lowman. 2024. HarperAudio.

Veteran Rowell narrator Lowman thoughtfully and beautifully emphasizes the many significant and heartfelt moments throughout this work. Her knowledge of Rowell's writing is evident in the attention to detail in this emotional performance.

Stars in Your Eyes. By Kacen Callender. Read by a full cast. 2023. Hachette Audio.

In this stupendous Hollywood-set full-cast audio, the memorably superior production includes seamlessly spliced narrator changes, playfully clicking keys, and swoony soundtrack snippets.

Rifts and Refrains. By Tiye. Read by iiKane and Benjamin Charles. 2024. Dreamscape.

Tiye's slow-burn romance is an audio-first homage to family ties, Black country music, and following one's artistic passion. Like a perfectly strummed guitar, it's sure to resonate long and strong.



Art from *Stars in Your Eyes*.

Voice of Choice

André Santana

by Heather Booth

This year's Voice of Choice, André Santana, was "plummeted into audiobooks" by a friend's recommendation of Rin Chupeco's *The Bone Witch* in 2019. The dive was so deep, just a few years later, in 2024, he performed in more than 70 titles. Santana says, "The fortune of getting fantastic books has really helped me along in my career and I see myself doing this for decades to come."

André Santana: The first book I ever narrated was one of the hardest things I'd ever done. I spent months communicating with the publisher and the author. I listened to interviews to craft the character based on the author's unique accent, and I had a disastrously difficult few nights trying to edit the entire title by hand. I loved the book and recording it, but the amount of work involved actually put me off of making audiobooks for several months. The next novel I recorded involved a whole team and was so fun, pulled character voices out of me, got me even deeper into loving books, and made me see a future in narrating.

Heather Booth: *Many of your notable performances are part of full-cast productions. What is your approach to creating full character portraits when your voice is recorded solo as just one piece of the puzzle?*

Santana: This is a problem for voice actors of all kinds. Very few of my titles have had the fortune of simultaneous recording (they're very expensive, but we actors love doing them). What binds these solo records together is communication and trust. When working without a director, narrators share voices and pronunciations, and we're tasked to imagine every character through the text. If we're being edited together in dialogue (duet) and not just responsible for our own chapters (dual), and I'm hearing a conversation as boisterous and hearty, I have to trust my co-narrator is hearing and delivering something similar. The producer helps guide that vision, but much of what you're hearing is what the actors are able to imagine. We



also trust that when we come alive as the character on the page and follow the author's vision, that the story will tell itself in a connective way.

Booth: *Are there particular genres or characters that you are attracted to, or types of stories that you especially like to record?*

Santana: I often use the phrase: "stories that remind me what it means to be human." Early on in narrating, I held insecurities about not being cast in mainstream adult fiction because I thought it was the most prestigious work we could get. But I've been blown away by the complexity of middle-grade, the bone-level reckoning of horror, the mastery needed to write powerful romances. Ultimately, I prefer to be genre-flexible. I've watched my favorite authors move across genres and audience ages while still keeping their essence, and learned that I, too, can find what I need in all forms of texts. I've been struck by characters that feel like they were truly mine to perform, ranging from heart-filled youngins (*Moonflower, Onyx & Beyond*), to pain-crafted men (*Stars in Your Eyes, Tropicália*), to the absurd (*Dual Memory, Toto*). I love performing characters who seem to just be

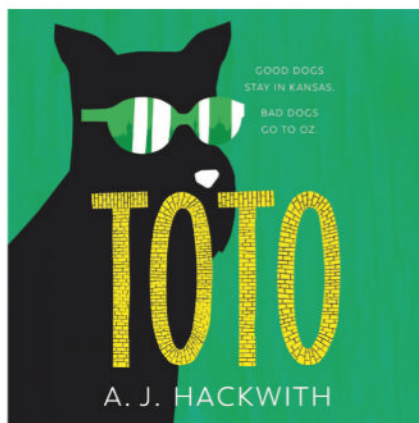
alive and exploring (*Sons of El Rey*, *Fame by Misadventure*). I was surprised that reading nonfiction in the voices of authors has grabbed me and left me satisfied on a metaphysical level (*Sito*, *Our Migrant Souls*, *The Truth about Immigration*). All of this is to say I don't know where my next favorite performance will come from. I'm just in love with writing and acting. These arts are the framework of my life.

Booth: *What book has offered you the greatest challenge? Greatest joy? Dream narration?*

Santana: I don't need to think about the hardest novel I've ever narrated. At the National Book Award Finalists Reading, I got to meet Percival Everett briefly and he acknowledged how challenging the translation to audio must have been. *Percival Everett by Virgil Russell* is an exploration that plays with voice and purpose and meaning. I can't even pretend I locked onto all of Everett's original intentions, but I hope I honored them with the play and honesty I brought to the audiobook. Pages of lists, math equations, several languages, shifting and ambiguous narrative voices . . . this book was a phenomenal challenge. I'm so glad I got to record it.

Greatest joy is harder because I'm always moving through highs and lows with new characters. *Hombrecito*, by Santiago Jose Sanchez, is filled with varied themes and incredible writing, but I remember pausing in the studio with the engineer and director on the line and just crying because one scene seemed rendered straight out of my own life. So much of the book felt like it saw me and I'll always hold immense joy and gratitude that I got to narrate that novel.

When I think about dream roles, I do love the idea of



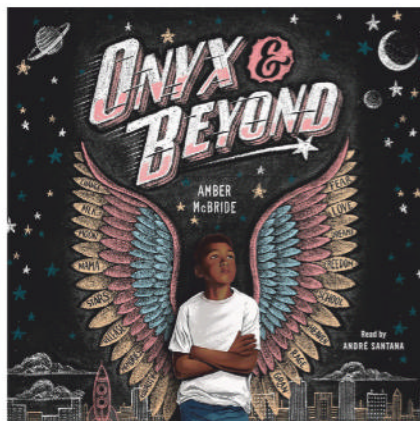
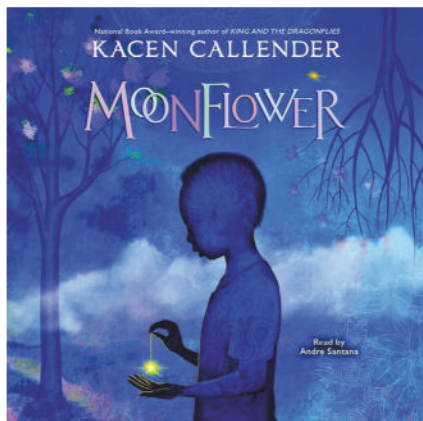
playing an animated antihero stacked tall with delectable writing. I got to watch Fiston Mwanza Mujila read from *The Villain's Dance* in the original French and when he started, his body just activated and it almost felt like the novel was written to song and dance. I love that kind of possibility in audio. I want this work to take me anywhere listeners will feel the most alive, and broken, and jubilant, and possible.

Booth: *Any favorite library stories to share?*

Santana: What a perfect chance to say that I grew up a proud patron of the Seattle Public Library and King County Library System, spending most of my childhood within blocks of the Lake City Branch. My first foray into audiobooks started there, where my brother and I would borrow and listen to *The Golden Compass* and *The Maximum Ride* series, and it was where I listened to my first secret-obsession novel, *Hush Hush*, by Becca Fitzpatrick. Over the years, those librarians dished out a steady helping of summer-reading challenges, and I learned to be a citizen of the net surfing the public computers. College was an important part of my life, but also a burnout point for my personal reading journey. If it weren't for my school librarians at Bryant and Kenmore Elementary,

Hamilton International Middle, Nathan Hale High School (shoutout to my college librarians at Simon's Rock, too!), I would not be where I am today as a reader or performer.

Writing and speaking are how we interface with the world and build something beautiful for the future. I feel privileged and proud to have this relationship to literature and the career that I do. Thank you to all the librarians who helped me find my way here.



PBS BOOKS

Black History Month

In 2021, PBS Books launched its partnership with the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), which was founded by Carter G. Woodson in 1915. This successful collaboration between PBS Books and ASALH has resulted in numerous interviews with outstanding African American authors, poets, and filmmakers discussing their important work. Woodson is credited with the creation of Black History Month; this year marks its ninety-ninth anniversary. In celebration of our continued partnership with ASALH, PBS Books features renowned historian and lawyer Mary Frances Berry, PhD, who recently wrote a new book, *Slavery after Slavery: Revealing the Legacy of Forced Child Apprenticeships on Black Families, from Emancipation to the Present*. This book explores post-Civil War America and the system

of apprenticeships that entrapped Black children and their families, leading to undue hardships for generations to come.

As Berry traces the stories behind individual cases from southern supreme courts, she demonstrates how formerly enslaved families and their descendants were systemically injured through white supremacist practices, perpetuated by the legal system. This work adds a powerful new argument in the case for reparations and restorative justice. Join us for this important conversation on Wednesday, Feb. 19 at 8 p.m. ET.

Interested in learning about other great authors through our videos; visit pbsbooks.org/blackhistorymonth.

PBS BOOKS READERS CLUB

PBS Books Readers Club pick for February is Charmaine Wilkerson's *Good Dirt*. If you enjoyed Wilkerson's best-selling debut novel *Black Cake*, then you'll love her new book. This multigenerational epic examines how the past informs our present. Ebony Freeman, the daughter of an affluent Black New England family, pieces together the connection between a childhood tragedy and a

beloved heirloom—a stoneware jar passed down six generations from the enslaved maker in South Carolina. This book complements Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s docuseries, *Great Migrations: A People on the Move*.

Read along and join us for a conversation with Wilkerson on Wednesday, Feb. 26 at 8 p.m. ET at pbsbooks.org.



PBS Program Highlights



NAACP and Its Architects

NAACP and Its Architects premieres on PBS' AMERICAN EXPERIENCE on Tuesday, Feb. 25, 9 p.m. ET on PBS, PBS.org, and PBS app. This new documentary tells the story of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the most powerful civil rights organization ever created, through the key figures who shaped it. One of the most important, but least understood figures in civil rights history, Walter White was the NAACP's longest reigning president. White clung to the belief that, for all its flaws, America held the seeds of its own redemption. When White



took over the NAACP in 1929, Black Americans were socially and politically marginalized. By the time he died in 1955, they were a crucial segment of the electorate and on the brink of the landmark legal and legislative victories that would forever reshape the country. The NAACP and its leaders, including White, W. E. B. DuBois, Thurgood Marshall, and Charles Hamilton Houston, created a blueprint for America to follow to live up to its ideals. Watch this documentary to better understand key aspects of African American history during the twentieth century.

A British Drama for Everyone

This winter, MASTERPIECE continues to bring quality shows: *All Creatures Great and Small*, Season 6; *Funny Woman*, Season 2; and *Miss Scarlet*, Season 5. With this outstanding lineup, there is something for everyone! Catch these great British shows on Sunday nights starting at 8 p.m. ET on PBS or watch them at pbs.org or on the PBS app.



Top 10

Romances for Youth

Love traverses queer subversions of classic stories, rare-manga hunting, the grumpy/sunshine trope, and more in these top titles.

At the End of the River Styx. By Michelle Kulwicki. Sept. 2024. Page Street YA. Gr. 9–12.

Bastian is haunted by nightmares of the underworld following his mother's tragic passing but finds refuge and perhaps something more in Zan, a servant of the monstrous Ferryman responsible for his fitful sleep.

The Breakup Lists. By Adib Khorram. 2024. Dial. Gr. 9–12.

In a story set amid the turbulence of high-school theater, Jackson's sister demands that he make lists of her exes' worst qualities, which would be a lot easier if he hadn't fallen for the most recent beau.

Ellie Haycock Is Totally Normal. By Gretchen Schreiber. 2024. St. Martin's/Wednesday. Gr. 8–12.

Born with an incurable medical condition, Ellie has to fight her mom and doctors for medical autonomy. When she starts to connect with other chronically ill teens and fall in love, Ellie realizes that her brand of normal might just be okay.

Escaping Mr. Rochester. By L. L. McKinney. 2024. HarperTeen. Gr. 9–12.

In a reimaged approach to Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Jane and Bertha grow to care for each other as they conspire to free Bertha from imprisonment and thwart the villainous Mr. Rochester.



Just Another Epic Love Poem. By Parisa Akhbari. 2024. Dial. Gr. 9–12.

Mitra and Bea have been Catholic-school co-conspirators since eighth grade. Now, Mitra is determined to hide her love for Bea as they tackle senior year, a poetry seminar, and other prospects of the future.

Navigating with You. By Jeremy Whitley. Art by Cassio Ribeiro. 2024. Maverick. Gr. 9–12.

Activist Neesha and chatty surfer Gabby bond over a shared passion for the elusive shojo manga classic *Super Navigator Nozomi*. As they search for volumes, this sweet comic highlights the complexity of finding unexpected love.

The No-Girlfriend Rule. By Christen Randall. 2024. Atheneum. Gr. 9–12.

Attempting to connect with her boyfriend's interest, Hollis joins a tabletop RPG group but is surprised to gain friendship, security, and perhaps more in this sweet love letter to queer, fat, neurodivergent girls.

This Day Changes Everything. By Edward Underhill. 2024. St. Martin's/Wednesday. Gr. 9–12.

Grumpy Leo and shiny Abby meet, buddy up, and fall for each other during the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade as they navigate queer identity and self-love, all in the span of 24 hours.

To a Darker Shore. By Leanne Schwartz. 2024. Page Street YA. Gr. 9–12.

Alesta sets out to save her friend (and possible soulmate) from being tithed at her expense in this *Inferno*-inspired epic journey, only to learn the sacrifices aren't what they seem.

With Love, Miss Americanah. By Jane Igharo. 2024. Feiwel and Friends. Gr. 9–12.

Enore and her family move from Nigeria to upstate New York following her father's death, where she learns how to be a quintessential American high-school student and find her voice.

Manga Essentials

Boys Love and Girls Love for High-Schoolers

by Sara Smith

While Boys Love and Girls Love manga are often written for adults overseas, they remain popular with teens and there are plenty suitable for younger audiences. Here are some wonderful series full of rich stories and amazing representation that would be perfect for high-school readers.

I'm in Love with the Villainess. Original story by Inori. Adapted and illustrated by Aonoshimo. Seven Seas.

Rei likes to unwind from her corporate job by playing her favorite dating sim, but she's a little dissatisfied with the love interests and wants to pursue Claire, the game's villainess. One night, Rei wakes up to find she's now Rae Taylor, the game's main character. Rather than panicking, Rae sees this as an opportunity to pursue Claire without the pesky guardrails of the game getting in the way! Rae's uphill battle to win over Claire's heart give this a cute and quirky quality, both in the illustrations and the quick-witted verbal sparring between the leading ladies.

Given. By Natsuki Kizu. Art by the author. SuBLime.

Four high-school students find solace, healing, and love through making music together in their band. Uenoyama is initially perturbed by Mafuyu's intrusion on his napping spot, especially because Mafuyu has an ill-treated, rusty-stringed guitar, but when the band discovers his angelic voice and the pain of his past, he joins vocals and as a lyricist, if he can find the right words. Soon they're all baring their souls live on stage. This story expertly blends emotion and music and incorporates romance at just the right moments. The illustrations kinetically convey the band's live performances and show every heartbreaking moment beautifully.

My Noisy Roommate: The Roof over My Head Comes with Monsters and a Hottie. By Kaho Ozaki. Art by the author. Kodansha.

Osuke finds himself homeless and recruited by a mysterious realtor and placed in a living situation that seems too good to be true: though it comes with hot guy Nijio, there are also strange spirits visiting him nightly disturbing his

sleep! When they finally come clean, Osuke discovers he's a magnet for spirits and Nijio is great at dealing with them, making them a dream team. Osuke finds himself signing on for room, board, a job, and a whole lot more than he ever expected. Ozaki beautifully illustrates this story full of imaginative, sometimes creepy, supernatural scenarios that draw on Japanese myths and blend contemporary problems into the world of ghosts. There are comical moments with cute illustrations, but also moments of romantic tension in what is surely going to be a slow-burn story.

Turns Out My Online Friend Is My Real-Life Boss! By Nmura. Art by the author. Kodansha.

Hashimoto doesn't really get along with his boss, who turns down every proposal and can be kind of a jerk. He finds refuge in his online game where his best friend, U.M.A., understands his daily plight. One day, U.M.A. suggests they meet in person, but Hashimoto is initially afraid it will be awkward and ruin their friendship. But when he finally agrees, he realizes U.M.A. is his nightmare of a boss! Then comes a string of comedic misunderstandings and some eventual romantic entanglements between characters for good measure. Nmura blends cute video-game aesthetics with visually appealing characters and lovely scenery. From beginning to end, this is quirky and delightful with some surprises, despite the title giving away one of the big reveals.

Whisper Me a Love Song. By Eku Takeshima. Art by the author. Kodansha.

Himari falls head over heels for Yori, the guitarist at her high school's welcoming ceremony. She confesses her feelings right away, and it seems like the feeling is mutual. But there's a big misunderstanding, which Yori doesn't realize and all her bandmates do: Himari meant that she'd become Yori's biggest fan that day, while Yori is actually really in love with Himari. Now, Yori's tasked by her meddling bandmates with writing a love song! There are definitely some adorable moments in this story full of miscommunication, but at its core, this is more about exploration, reflection, and identity as Yori and Himari sort out their feelings and decide who they are.

Art from *I'm in Love with the Villainess*.



Reserve These Reads

Children & Teens

Get your hands on these hotly anticipated books, all out this month.

Older

(S)Kin. By Ibi Zoboi. HarperCollins/Versify. Gr. 9–12.

Critically acclaimed author Zoboi makes her fantasy debut with this novel in verse about the entwined lives of a Brooklyn teen and a fireball witch.

The Otherwhere Post. By Emily J. Taylor. Putnam. Gr. 9–12.

Maevie ventures to the Otherwhere Post, determined to discover the truth about her father's crimes through the power of scriptomancy, finding romance and confidence along the way.

Under the Same Stars. By Libba Bray. Farrar. Gr. 9–12.

Best-selling, award-winning Bray's latest features young adults across three eras marked by global unrest in a novel that explores the rise and fall of authoritarian regimes amid a compelling mystery of missing teens.



Art from *Hilwa's Gifts*.

Middle

All the Blues in the Sky. By Renée Watson. Bloomsbury. Gr. 5–8.

Watson, *New York Times* best-seller and multi-award-winning author of thoughtful, adeptly written, and lyrical books, here offers a story about a 13-year-old girl's experience with deep grief.

Max in the Land of Lies. By Adam Gidwitz. Dutton. Gr. 3–6.

The sequel to Gidwitz's widely acclaimed *Max in the House of Spies* finds Max in Berlin as a British spy, and despite explicit instructions, he's determined to track down his parents while he's there.

It's All or Nothing, Vale. By Andrea Beatriz Arango. Random. Gr. 5–8.

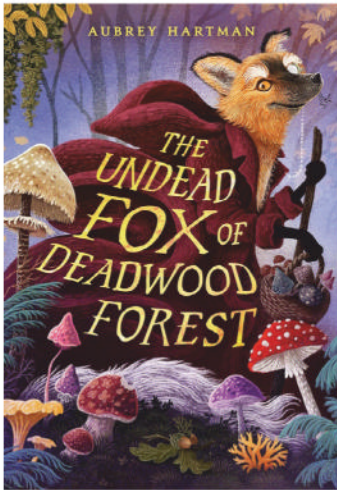
Arango's vibrant verse ushers Vale's story along as she navigates her recovery from an injury, her return to fencing, and her first crush.

Sea Legs. By Jules Bakes. Art by Niki Smith. Scholastic/Graphix. Gr. 3–7.

Janey is lonely living on a boat with her parents most of the year, so when she meets a kid her age, she's thrilled, but friendship in the long term is harder than she thought.



Art from *Sea Legs*.



The Undead Fox of Deadwood Forest. By Aubrey Hartman. Little, Brown. Gr. 4–7.

In this whimsical, lightly macabre yet sweet and uplifting animal story, Clare, an undead fox who ushers lost souls to the afterlife, is flummoxed when a badger's soul won't move on.

A World Worth Saving. By Kyle Lukoff. Dial. Gr. 5–9.

In his first foray into fantasy, best-selling, award-winning Lukoff offers a sharp novel about A, a trans boy with transphobic parents who discovers their parent group is run by an actual, literal demon.



Younger

The Gift of Eid. By Shifa Saltagi Safadi. Illus. by Aaliya Jaleel. Holiday. PreS–Gr. 3.

In this touching retelling of “The Gift of the Magi” set in Syria, a young girl and her mother present the perfect Eid gift to each other.

The Gift of the Great Buffalo. By Carole Lindstrom. Illus. by Aly McKnight. Bloomsbury. PreS–Gr. 2.

In the early 1880s, young Métis-Ojibwe Rose heads out on her own to track down the buffalo herd and save her community from the long winter ahead.

Good Golden Sun. By Brendan Wenzel. Illus. by the author. Little, Brown. PreS–Gr. 3.

The popular author/illustrator behind *They All Saw a Cat* and other titles takes a more global approach in this lyrical picture book celebrating the sun.

Hilwa's Gifts. By Safa Suleiman. Illus. by Anait Semirdzhyan. Candlewick. PreS–Gr. 2.

A visit to his family's homeland of Palestine shows Ali the many cultural gifts that are produced by olive trees common to that area.

Meena and the Microbiome. By Majdi Osman. Illus. by Teresa Martínez. Candlewick/MIT Kids. K–Gr. 2.

A trip to the backyard by Meena and her mother leads to a discussion of microbes and their many helpful properties in this charming, effortlessly accessible introduction to these tiny but hugely significant organisms.

Poo Pile on the Prairie. By Amy Hevron. Illus. by the author. Simon & Schuster/Beach Lane. PreS–Gr. 2.

This amusing addition to the Tiny Habitats series turns the seemingly silly subject of bison poop into a thoughtful study of a vital ecosystem.

Your Farm. By Jon Klassen. Illus. by the author. Candlewick. PreS.

Using his signature art style, Klassen offers a trio of board books (with *Your Forest* and *Your Island*) with gentle stories about the eponymous locations over the course of a day.



Art from *Your Farm*.



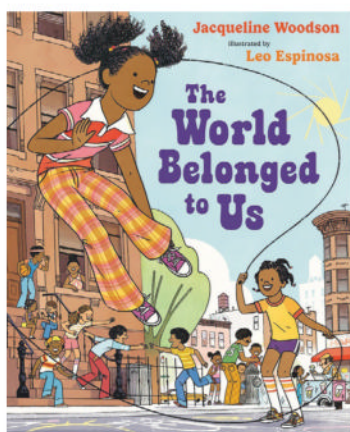
Art from *The Parker Inheritance*.

Family Reads

Old Favorites and New Views on Black History

by Heather Booth and Sarah Hunter

As parents, we love sharing the stories that made impressions on us with our children. This February, as we honor Black History month, *Booklist* looks back at some parental favorite titles that were landmark books in their time, which many of us read and loved as kids, and suggests vibrant and engaging options with new and updated perspectives on similar topics from modern Black creators. Those titles also recommended as audiobooks are indicated with a 



If you loved:

A Snowy Day, by Ezra Jack Keats . . .

Keats' beloved picture book is a tiny adventure story about young Peter. Illustrated in a gentle style with paper collage, Peter's story takes him throughout his urban neighborhood, exploring how his surroundings have changed on a very snowy morning before returning to the warmth of his family's kitchen.

Try . . .

 **Boogie Boogie, Y'all.** By C. G. Esperanza. Illus. by the author. 2021. HarperCollins/Katherine Tegen. PreS–Gr. 2.

There's music in the city and there's music in the kids! Follow the bright, bouncy, graffiti-style illustrations as children adventure around their neighborhood finding the rhythms of life all around them. Author/illustrator Esperanza also narrates the audiobook into a song that will get young and old on their feet and dancing around the room.

A Poem for Peter: The Story of Ezra Jack Keats and the Creation of *The Snowy Day*. By Andrea Davis Pinkney. Illus. by Lou Fancher and Steve Johnson. 2016. Viking. Gr. 2–5.

Using a complementary illustration style, this title introduces parents and kids to the story behind the story. Pinkney shares how Keats' experience with discrimination as the son of Polish Jewish immigrants helped him empathize with the young Black boy he created in Peter.

The World Belonged to Us. By Jacqueline Woodson. Illus. by Leo Espinosa. 2022. Penguin/Nancy Paulsen. PreS–Gr. 2.

Once upon a time in Brooklyn, children ran and played and splashed joyfully in fire hydrants till their mothers called them home. Brightly colored illustrations jam-packed with joyful details fill every page in this positive recollection of youthful summertime exploration.

If you loved:

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, by Mark Twain . . .

You'll likely have heard of 2024's breakout *James*, by Percival Everett, which retells Twain's classroom required reading from the perspective of Huck's companion. Much reflection on the Civil War and Reconstruction era has developed in the time since this classic was canonized. These titles lean into the dignity of their characters.

Try . . .

 **Kin:** Rooted in Hope. By Carole Boston Weatherford. Illus. by Jeffery Boston Weatherford. 2023. Atheneum. Gr. 5–8.

This look at tracing a Black family's history is a family affair in itself. Author Carol Boston Weatherford explores her own journey in finding her ancestors through poetry. Her son, Jeffery Boston Weatherford, enhances the text with his stark and evocative scratchboard art. On audio, a dual narration breathes life into the verses.

 **So Many Beginnings:** A Little Women Remix. By Bethany C. Morrow. 2021. Feiwel and Friends. Gr. 8–11.

Meg, Jo, Amy, and Beth are emancipated sisters living in the freedpeople's colony of Roanoke Island. The lyrical air of joy in the sisters' relationships is enhanced by their status as formerly enslaved. Morrow's ability to take the lingering stain of slavery on American history and use it as a catalyst for unbreakable love and resilience is flawless.

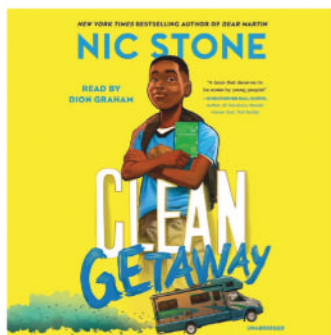
 **Will's Race for Home.** By Jewell Parker Rhodes. 2025. illus. Little, Brown. Gr. 3–6.

In the Reconstruction era, Will and his family make a mad dash to claim a plot of land all their own as formerly enslaved people during the Oklahoma Land Rush. Themes of freedom, loyalty, and adventure will resonate with those who remember Huck fondly. Illustrations and a brisk pace make this ideal for bedtime read-alongs, and Rhodes incorporates multiple perspectives from characters whose perspectives aren't always shared in historical fiction.

If you loved:

To Kill a Mockingbird, by Harper Lee . . .

Renowned for its beloved characters, southern mystery, and courtroom drama, *Mockingbird* (*TKAM*) is universally known as a coming-of-age classic. It is told through the eyes of Scout, a young white girl and the daughter of a prominent lawyer (the unforgettable Gregory Peck on film). These read-alikes offer takes on similar issues that dive behind the pages or offer stories from the perspectives of Black characters.



Try . . .

 **Clean Getaway.** By Nic Stone. Illus. by Dawud Anyabwile. 2020. 240p. Crown. Gr. 5–8.

Scoob is a Black middle-school computer whiz whose white grandma whisks him away for a spring break trip to dive into their family history and how Jim Crow laws impacted them all, especially Scoob's grandfather's incarceration and estrangement. Though the book deals with painful topics, the perspective is of exploration of an integral part of America's past through the lens of one family's journey to mutual understanding and eventual generational acceptance.

 **The Parker Inheritance.** By Varian Johnson. 2018. Scholastic/Arthur A. Levine. Gr. 5–7.

Neighborhood adventuring, long-held secrets, and young peoples' attempts to right wrongs all come together here as they did in *TKAM*. Candice and her neighbor Brandon find a letter that reveals a racist episode involving Candice's grandma being forced from their South Carolina town. Together, the kids dive into the hidden history of Lambert to finish what her grandma started.

 **Tru and Nelle.** By G. Neri. 2016. HMH. Gr. 4–6.

Before there was *TKAM* there was a friendship between Harper Lee (called Nell) and Truman Capote. Readers will feel great compassion for these two misfits in Depression-era Alabama, and this story of childhood friendship gives a deeper background to the creation of Lee's classic novel.

Booklist

The Global Reach of Rick Riordan

The Misewa Saga, by David A. Robertson



Healer of the Water Monster, by Brian Young



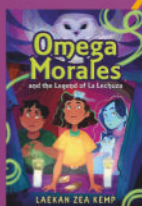
Cece Rios and the Desert of Souls, by Kaela Rivera



Lei and the Fire Goddess, by Malia Maunakea



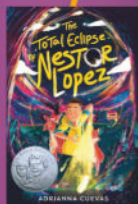
Omega Morales and the Legend of La Lechuza, by Laeken Zea Kemp



Charlie Hernandez and the League of Shadows, by Ryan Calejo



The Total Eclipse of Nestor Lopez, by Adrianna Cueva



The Enchanted Life of Valentina Mejia, by Alexandra Alessandri



Serwa Boateng's Guide to Vampire Hunting, by Roseanne A. Brown



Maya and the Rising Dark series, by Rena Barron



Pilar Ramirez and the Escape from Zafa, by Julian Randall



Moko Magic: Carnival Chaos, by Tracey Baptiste



Mari and the Curse of El Cocodrilo, by Adrianna Cuevas



Kelcie Murphy and the Academy for the Unbreakable Arts, by Erika Lewis



Root Magic, by Eden Royce



Nic Blake and the Remarkables: The Manifestor Prophecy, by Angie Thomas



Loki's Wolves, by K. L. Armstrong and illustrated by Vivenne To



Rick Riordan's *Lightning Thief*, which came out 20 years ago this year, launched a hugely popular subgenre of myth-based middle-grade adventures, even beyond those published by his eponymous imprint, Rick Riordan Presents. This map shows some of the wide variety of global mythologies to be found in books in this subgenre, but it's only a fraction of what Riordan has inspired in the last two decades.

Muse Squad: The Cassandra Curse, by Chantel Acevedo



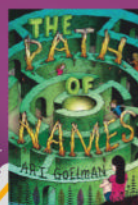
Daughters of the Lamp, by Nedda Lewers



Shad Hadid and the Alchemists of Alexandria, by George Jreije



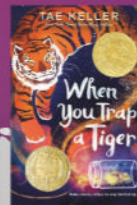
Path of Names, by Ari Goelman



The Girl Who Speaks Bear, by Sophie Anderson



When You Trap a Tiger, by Tae Keller



The Last Fallen Star, by Graci Kim



Ring of Solomon, by Aden Polydoros



Momo Arashima Steals the Sword of the Wind, by Misa Sugiura



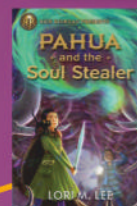
Farrah Noorzad and the Ring of Fate, by Deeba Zargarpur



The Dragon Warrior, by Katie Zhao



Pahua and the Soul Stealer, by Lori M. Lee



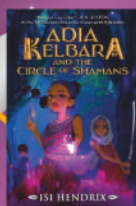
Amira & Hamza: The War to Save the Worlds, by Samira Ahmed



Lulu Sinagtala and the City of Noble Warriors, by Gail D. Villanueva



Adia Kelbara and the Circle of Shamans, by Isi Hendrix



Nura and the Immortal Palace, by M. T. Khan



Girl Giant and the Monkey King, by Van Hoang



Children of the Quicksands, by Efua Traoré



Cameron Battle and the Hidden Kingdoms, by Jamar J. Perry



Kiki Kallira Conquers a Curse, by Sangu Mandanna



The Serpent's Secret, by Sayantani DasGupta



The Girl and the Ghost, by Hanna Alkaf



Top 10

Novels for Tweens

Novels exploring the tween experience, capturing precious but oft-challenging times riddled with new, big feelings, have gained admirable traction over the past few years, finding their ground in the nebulous space between middle-grade and young adult titles. These great novels speak well to that enigmatic realm.

The Bletchley Riddle. By Ruta Sepetys and Steve Sheinkin. 2024. Viking. Gr. 5–8.

Powerhouses Sepetys and Sheinkin collaborate on this WWII novel, where 14-year-old Lizzie joins her 19-year-old brother in London, and the pair becomes enmeshed in efforts to break Germany's Enigma codes while searching for their missing American mother.

Boy 2.0. By Tracey Baptiste. 2024. Little, Brown. Gr. 7–10.

Serial foster kid Win “Coal” Keegan’s world turns upside down when, after running from the police, he shockingly turns invisible and is thrust into the mysteries of a biotech company connected to his past.

Bye Forever, I Guess. By Jodi Meadows. 2024. Holiday. Gr. 5–8.

In this hilarious, pitch-perfect middle-grade romance,

insecure Ingrid tries to juggle real life with her popular (but secret) online persona, in a story that comes to a head when her best friend Rachel betrays her.

I Was Told There Would Be Romance. By Marie Arnold. 2024. Little, Brown. Gr. 7–11.

Fifteen-year-old Falencia “Fancy” Augustine must reckon with her lies and slipping academics as she amusingly pursues the great high school goal of being noticed.

Jupiter Rising. By Gary D. Schmidt. 2024. Clarion. Gr. 6–9.

Eighth-grader Jack is excited at the prospect of his foster family adopting his deceased foster brother’s daughter, Jupiter, but the court system and Jupiter’s grandparents stand in the way.

Keeping Pace. By Laurie Morrison. 2024. Abrams/Amulet. Gr. 5–8.

Grace Eller has placed a lot of significance in her academic standing, so she’s crushed when, at the end of middle school, top student designation goes to her sworn enemy. Through running, however, she learns there’s more to life and connection than good grades.

Mani Semilla Finds Her Quetzal Voice. By Anna Lapera. 2024. Levine Querido/Arthur A. Levine. Gr. 6–8.

Timid seventh-grader Mani Semilla taps into her Guatemalan heritage and learns to advocate for the rights of women and girls, entering the Speak Up social justice competition with her best friends.

Moonstorm. By Yoon Ha Lee. 2024. Delacorte. Gr. 7–10.

In this Korean-inspired fantasy exploring propaganda and settler colonialism, boarding school student Hwa Young trains to become an elite space pilot for the same Empire that destroyed her home.

Quagmire Tiarello Couldn’t Be Better. By Mylisa Larsen. 2024. Clarion. Gr. 5–8.

Quentin “Quagmire” Tiarello’s mentally ill mother abandons him mid-road trip, leaving the 14-year-old to fend for himself. Luckily, familial opportunity gives Quagmire the chance to be a kid, and letting up on the adulting gives him space to consider his relationship with his mom.

The Wolf-Girl, the Greeks, and the Gods: A Tale of the Persian Wars. By Tom Holland. Illus. by Jason Cockcroft. 2024. Candlewick Studio. Gr. 5–8.

Holland takes readers through a fantastical version of the Greco-Persian Wars, following Gorgo as she ages from tween princess to adult queen in the brutally bellicose culture of Sparta.

Art from *Quagmire Tiarello Couldn’t Be Better*.



Top 10

Middle-Grade Graphic Novels

Graphic novels for middle-grade readers continue to flourish, and as these 10 titles demonstrate, there's an impressive array of genres and topics to satisfy a wide range of readers.

Boy vs. Shark. By Paul Gilligan. Art by the author. 2024. Tundra. Gr. 5–8.

Paul watches *Jaws* to impress his best bud, but it leaves him with overwhelming anxiety not only about sharks but about the future of their friendship.

Buckle Up. By Lawrence Lindell. Art by the author. 2024. Random/RH Graphic. Gr. 3–6.

Navigating life with newly divorced parents, Lonnie frequently finds himself trapped in the car, but the conversations started there lead to better family understanding.

Detective Beans and the Case of the Missing Hat. By Li Chen. Art by the author. 2024. Andrews McMeel. Gr. 2–5.

Detective Beans is searching for his missing hat in this hilarious spoof of hardboiled-detective stories that stars adorable cats.

The Other Side of Tomorrow. By Tina Cho. Art by Deb JJ Lee. 2024. HarperAlley. Gr. 5–8.

Junho and Myunghee separately escape North Korea, but their paths continually intertwine in this stunning graphic novel combining arresting artwork and poetic text.

The Ribbon Skirt. By Cameron Mukwa. Art by the author. 2024. Scholastic/Graphix. Gr. 3–7.

Anang, a two-spirit tween, is feeling uncertain about wearing a ribbon skirt to the upcoming powwow, until they find guidance and confidence in their family and community.

Save Our Forest! By Nora Dåsnes. Art by the author. Tr. by Lise Laerdal Bryn. 2024. Astra/Hippo Park. Gr. 4–8.

Bao undertakes an environmental campaign while persevering through personal challenges. Balancing humor and heart, Bao's story is timely and inspiring.

Shock City. By Aaron Alexovich. Art by the author. 2024. Viking. Gr. 4–7.

Sunny's family's experiments are possibly destroying her town, and when shy human Milo arrives, they team up to solve the problem, with plenty of darkly comic antics along the way.

The Snips: A Bad Buzz Day. By Raúl the Third. Art by Raúl the Third and others. 2025. Little, Brown Ink. Gr. 3–6.

The titular barber quintet takes on its rival, the Bad Buzz Boys, in this raucous bilingual comic in the author's signature bold, bombastic style.

Uprooted: A Memoir about What Happens When Your Family Moves Back. By Ruth Chan. Art by the author. 2024. Roaring Brook. Gr. 3–7.

Chan's sensitive, authentic, and funny graphic memoir thoughtfully portrays her experiences grappling with change and uncertainty after moving to Hong Kong.

We Are Big Time. By Hena Khan. Art by Safiya Zerrougui. 2024. Knopf. Gr. 4–8.

Aliya's excited about joining the all-hijabi basketball team at her new school, but being named cocaptain after a tough start to the season adds lots of pressure.



Art from *Detective Beans and the Case of the Missing Hat*.

Top 10

Fantastical Middle-Grade Novels

These top 10 fantastical middle-grade novels showcase the genre's breadth, covering everything from classical adventure to modern mystery.

A Game of Noctis. By Deva Fagan. 2024. Atheneum. Gr. 4–7.

Desperate to save her grandfather, Pia joins a band of misfits in order to compete in the ultimate competition, Noctis, which pits them against Lady Death herself.

The House with a Dragon in It. By Nick Lake. Illus. by Emily Gravett. 2024. Simon & Schuster. Gr. 3–5.

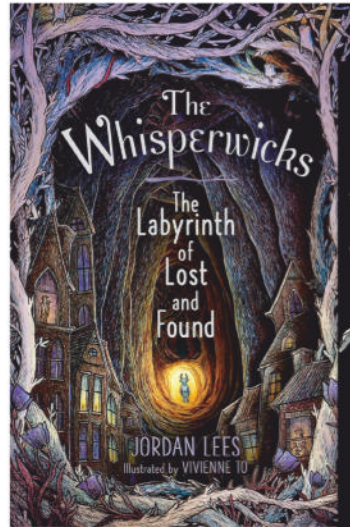
When a sinkhole appears in her foster family's living room, Summer finds herself face to face with an ancient dragon and caught up in a magical adventure.

Impossible Creatures. By Katherine Rundell. Illus. by Ashley Mackenzie. 2024. Knopf. Gr. 3–7.

In this quintessential fantasy adventure, Christopher joins Mal in the magical Archipelago to help save the last griffin and stop the world's magic from dying out.

Jax Freeman and the Phantom Shriek. By Kwame Mbalia. 2024. Disney/Freedom Fire. Gr. 5–8.

After Jax is drawn into an underground world of summoners who can call upon the power of their ancestral spirits, he must clear his family's name and solve a magical mystery.



The Labyrinth of Lost and Found. By Jordan Lees. Illus. by Vivienne To. 2024. Simon & Schuster. Gr. 3–6.

When Benjamiah Creek stumbles into the magical world of Wreathenwold, he joins a girl's dangerous search for her brother—and hopefully a way home.

Lola. By Karla Arenas Valenti. Illus. by Islenia Mil. 2024. Knopf. Gr. 4–7.

When it seems that something is sapping the life out of her family's magical tree as well as from her brother, Lola enters the magical realm of Floresta to investigate.

Olivetti. By Allie Millington. 2024. Feiwel and Friends. Gr. 4–6.

An introverted boy and his missing mother's cherished typewriter plumb forgotten family stories in this touching middle-grade mystery with a quirky fantastical twist.

Puppet. By David Almond. Illus. by Lizzy Stewart. 2024. Candlewick. Gr. 3–6.

After Silvester, a solitary, childless puppeteer, creates a sentient puppet, he teaches the unusual boy how to treasure his existence and the world around him.

Sona and the Golden Beasts. By Rajani LaRocca. 2024. HarperCollins/Quill Tree. Gr. 4–7.

This South Asian-inspired fantasy, rich in historical detail and mythical lore, sees Sona and her ailing ayah's magical grandson on the run in search of a fabled cure to restore the woman's health.

The Story of Gumluck and the Dragon's Eggs. By Adam Rex. Illus. by the author. 2024. Chronicle. Gr. 2–4.

After unwittingly laying her eggs in a dragon's nest, Helvetica the raven pretends to be a dragon to get them back, and Gumluck holds a competition to settle the dispute.



CELEBRATE YOUR FREEDOM TO READ

SHOP bit.ly/GraphicsGiftShop

UNITE
for imagination.

UNITE
for truth.

UNITE
for readers.

UNITE
for libraries.

UNITE
with us.



uniteagainstbookbans.org



PROUD PARTNERS

Booklist
Leading book discovery

ALA American Library Association